

Committee on Resources

resources.committee@mail.house.gov

[Home](#) [Press Gallery](#) [Subcommittees](#) [Issues](#) [Legislation](#) [Hearing Archives](#)

Testimony of Aileen Roder, Program Director at

Taxpayers for Common Sense before the

Water and Power Subcommittee, Resources Committee

April 1, 2003

Good afternoon, Chairman Calvert, Congresswoman Napolitano, and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee. I am Aileen Roder, Program Director at Taxpayers for Common Sense (TCS), a national, non-partisan budget watchdog group. I would like to thank you for inviting me to testify at this hearing regarding H.R. 901 which would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to construct a bridge on federal land west of and adjacent to Folsom Dam in California. The bridge that formerly traversed Folsom Dam was closed to public use in February 2003.

Taxpayers for Common Sense strongly opposes H.R. 901, introduced by Representatives John Doolittle (R-CA) and Doug Ose (R-CA). This legislation overlooks other more appropriate approaches to replace the bridge that formerly traversed Folsom Dam. The most prominent proposal that H.R. 901 ignores is the current U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) plan to build a temporary bridge southeast of Folsom Dam in conjunction with their overall plan to raise the Folsom Dam seven feet in order to provide much needed flood control to the City of Sacramento. This bridge could be turned over to the City of Folsom and would resolve the security concerns that caused the Bureau of Reclamation to close the bridge over Folsom Dam to public use. H.R. 901 also ignores additional proposals for a bridge to be built with appropriate local and federal cost sharing by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT).

In February 2002, the Corps of Engineers released a Final Supplemental Plan Formulation Report/Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (FEIS). This FEIS called for a 7-foot raise of Folsom Dam in order to reduce the City of Sacramento's flood risk to a 1-in-213 chance in any given year. Recognizing the obvious impact of the raise on the dam bridge traffic, the Corps proposed a temporary bridge southeast of Folsom Dam. The bridge would be similarly sized to the bridge that formerly traversed Folsom Dam. The Corps stated that the bridge could be left in place if a local sponsor is identified to assume the operation and maintenance responsibilities. The Corps plan for the 7-foot raise received a favorable Chief of Engineer's report in November 2003. I have attached the applicable portions of the Corps FEIS to my testimony.

H.R. 901 ignores the Corps proposal, and instead tries to end run the normal process for highway improvements and local cost share requirements for road-building improvements. Instead of involving the USDOT, or other entities such as the City of Folsom, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), or the Army Corps of Engineers, H.R. 901 drags the Bureau of Reclamation, a completely unrelated agency, into the process.

The Bureau of Reclamation's mission is to "manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public." The Bureau is in the water supply business not the bridge-building business. Legislation that foists responsibilities upon the Bureau that are outside of its core mission sets a terrible precedent by potentially reducing the agency's effectiveness in managing the West's water supply. At a time when federal deficits are the highest in history, monies allocated under H.R. 901 will compete with legitimate Bureau of Reclamation funding in the Energy and Water Appropriations bill.

On January 8, 2003, the entire California congressional delegation sent a letter to Department of Interior Secretary Norton and Attorney General John Ashcroft expressing reservations regarding the misdirection of Bureau of Reclamation funds. This letter requested that settlement funds for *Sumner Peck Ranch Inc. v. Bureau of Reclamation* not come from the Bureau of Reclamation's budget. The California delegation pointed out that Bureau of Reclamation funding should not be used for non-Bureau projects. We agree that robbing the coffers of one agency to pay for projects that should legitimately be run through another agency sets up a system doomed to failure. Specifically, we oppose efforts to force the Bureau of Reclamation to fund and build a bridge when this is both outside its core mission and would compete with appropriate funding of Bureau projects. I have attached the January 8, 2003 letter to my testimony for submission to the record.

TCS recognizes that the construction of a new bridge is potentially necessary now that the bridge that traversed Folsom Dam has been closed due to security concerns. We also recognize that a wider bridge may be needed, however, H.R. 901 sidesteps the essential process that USDOT has in place to evaluate the need for such improvements.

H.R. 901 clearly envisions more than replacing the bridge that traversed Folsom Dam. This bill would likely upgrade the bridge from two lanes to four lanes. USDOT has a process and formula to identify when highway upgrades, such as improving a road from two lanes to four lanes, are justified. The City of Folsom and the State of California, in concert with the Highway Trust Fund, are the proper sources for bridge enhancement design and funding. Replacing or upgrading Folsom Dam Road is a transportation need and as such it is inappropriate to tap the general treasury or energy and water appropriations for funding.

Despite the debate on cost sharing that occurred during the hearing and mark-up of H.R. 2301, a virtually identical bill from the 107th Congress, H.R. 901 fails to include any non-federal cost sharing and instead forces federal taxpayers to pay the entire cost of the bridge. While we recognize that security concerns are potentially a legitimate reason for some level of federal funding, bridge upgrade costs should be borne in the normal fashion by the local beneficiaries of bridge expansion.

H.R. 901 is the second attempt by Congressman Doolittle to pass a bill requiring the Bureau of Reclamation to build a bridge to replace the one on Folsom Dam. According to Congressman Doolittle's June 26, 2001 press release on his original bill H.R. 2301, "The region's heavy reliance on the Folsom Dam Road means that even temporary closures can snarl traffic through Folsom, inconveniencing drivers and harming the local retail-based economy." Representative Doolittle added, "It is clear that a permanent, full-service bridge is needed to ensure greater transportation efficiency and commuter convenience."

Building a bridge to replace Folsom Dam Road may be necessary, but building an enhanced, four-lane bridge cannot be attributed to security or safety. Instead, this upgrade from a two to four-lane bridge is tied to local economics and the convenience of the City of Folsom's citizens. Further, the bridge that traversed Folsom Dam was intended as a maintenance road rather than to be used for commuter traffic. The federal taxpayer should not be picking up the whole \$66.5 million tab for "commuter convenience". Further, recent articles in the *Sacramento Bee* (March 4, 2003), *Folsom Telegraph* (March 12, 2003), and *Auburn Journal* (March 14, 2003) found that the predicted post-dam road closure "traffic snarls" never materialized.

H.R. 901 demands that the federal taxpayer shell out \$66.5 million and then outrageously requires the government to turn the bridge over to a non-contributing, non-federal entity. Taxpayers should not have to entirely fund an upgraded bridge and then be forced to turn that bridge over to local entities that refused to contribute a dime to design and construction of that bridge. Caltrans and the City of Folsom should be required to pay a fair share of bridge replacement costs.

In closing, H.R. 901 sets a dangerous precedence of derailing the Bureau of Reclamation from its core mission rather than staying true to the increasingly essential work of managing western water supplies. The Bureau of Reclamation is not now and never has been a highway construction agency. It is crucial that federal and non-federal cost sharing be strictly defined in any bill authorizing a replacement for Folsom Dam Road. H.R. 901 makes an end run of the normal highway authorization process, ignoring a common sense procedure set in place by the USDOT to evaluate the need for highway construction and upgrades. The replacement bridge planned by the Army Corps in their FEIS is estimated to cost \$20 to \$30 million compared to the \$66.5 million price tag of H.R. 901. Other proposals exist to have the USDOT replace the bridge with local cost sharing. Congress should not raid the coffers of agencies dependent on energy and water appropriations to pay for the traffic convenience of a few local beneficiaries.

Thank you again for opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

####